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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000041

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: SECOND AHMADINEJAD ASSOCIATE ARRESTED AFTER EXPOSING
CORRUPTION

REF: RPO DUBAI 0030

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ramin Asgard, Director, Iran Regional Presence
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(S//NF) Summary: Abdollah Shahbazi has been dubbed by Iranian press as the "second exposé" after minor politician Abbas Palizdar (reftel). Shahbazi was reportedly jailed June 18 for several days and then escaped an assassination attempt July 6 after accusing high-ranking clerics and IRGC officials in Fars province of expropriating land. According to press reports, Shahbazi is a founding member of the Intelligence Ministry's Center for Political Research and as such, also published documents in May detailing "secret talks" between the Supreme Leader and senior officials regarding the 1990s chain murders. Shahbazi, like Palizdar, has been linked to Ahmadinejad in the press. One Iranian businessman, who claims close connections to power circles in Iran, postulated that Ahmadinejad is using the likes of Palizdar and Shahbazi as insurance against clerics who want to see him removed from power prior to the next presidential election. End Summary.

The accusations

12. (U) According to the Iranian Student News Agency (ISNA), historian and Intelligence Ministry collaborator Abdollah Shahbazi was arrested June 18 on charges of "slander and spreading lies," after claiming that several high-ranking officials from Fars province had expropriated land. Friday prayer leader and the Supreme Leader's representative in Shiraz Ayatollah Mohyeddin Haeri-Shirazi and Fars Province IRGC Commander and Commander in the Ansar al-Mahdi Army, Brigadier-General Abdoali Najafi were among those accused. Reportedly, Fars provincial prosecutor-general Ahmad Siavash-Pour said June 18 that the arrest came after 8 private individuals (including Haeri-Shirazi and Najafi) filed complaints against Shahbazi.

3.(U) This is not the first time that Shahbazi publicly denounced officials on charges of economic corruption. According to the press, while speaking at Shiraz University in late 2007, Shahbazi named and accused "a number of" IRGC and governorship officials of economic corruption. In an attempt to

prove his claims, Shahbazi wrote a book titled "Land and Accumulation of Wealth: The Genesis of a New Oligarchy in Contemporary Iran." ISNA reports that the book was published on his website (www.shahbazi.org).

4.(U) This does, however, appear to be the first time that Shahbazi was jailed for making allegations of economic corruption. Furthermore, subsequent to his release on bail, Shahbazi wrote a letter to Ahmadinejad claiming that an attempt was made on his life. Edalatkhah website, which is affiliated to President Ahmadinejad, reported the assassination attempt on July 8 along with the following details: "After a series of protest statements by Shahbazi about corruption and fraud in real estate deals in the province of Fars, armed men two nights ago chased his car and attempted to kidnap and assassinate him...when the chasers discovered that Shahbazi was not in the vehicle they were following, they beat up the driver and threatened him with a pistol. They then attempted to kidnap the driver who after being hit in the head was forced to drive his car off a curb and then ran out of the vehicle to flee."

5.(U) In May, Shahbazi also made headlines after taking a dispute with Rohallah Hosseinian public. Hosseinian is the head of the Islamic Revolution Documents Center and the judiciary's former representative at the Ministry of Intelligence under Ali Fallahian. According to press, Hosseinian was insisting that despite a military tribunal claiming otherwise, former intelligence officer Saeed Emami was not a main perpetrator of the chain murders in the 1990s. To prove Emami's guilt, Shahbazi published a partial account of a top-secret June 23, 1999 meeting. Present at the meeting, which reportedly took place in front of the Supreme Leader, was then President Khatami, Nategh Nouri, Mohammad Yazdi, Expediency Council Chair Rafsanjani, former Intelligence Minister Younesi, Head of the armed forces judicial tribunal Niyazi and three officials in charge of the case. According to Rooz Online, the question of how Shahbazi gained access to such sensitive information,

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particularly when it was never even available to the victim's attorneys, is still unknown.

Shahbazi's background

6.(U) According to open source information, Shahbazi was born in Shiraz in 1955. His father, Habubollah Khan Shahbazi, was the last Khan of the Sorkhi tribes of the Kuhmarre Sorkhi region in southern Shiraz. His father reportedly led Iran's 1962-1963 tribal rebellion against the Pahlavi dynasty and was then executed for his role. A Tehran University graduate, Shahbazi was himself arrested in his youth for political activities against the state. Before the 1979 revolution, Shahbazi joined Iran's Tudeh Party (communist party) and was re-arrested in 1983, but while jailed he reportedly collaborated with the Intelligence Ministry. Shahbazi is said to be one of the founders of the "Center for Political Research" in Iran's Intelligence Ministry - a center that he ran for 10 years. Shahbazi was also appointed by the Supreme Leader to serve at the "Center for Study of Contemporary Iranian History," which is affiliated with the Bonyad-e Mostazafeen.

7.(U) Rooz Online reports that Shahbazi, who retains close ties to the conservative camp and the "security faction based in Kayhan Newspaper and the Islamic Revolution Documents Center," is now introducing himself as being affiliated with the "President's Special Investigation Unit," which is headed by President Ahmadinejad's brother, Davoud Ahmadinejad.

Shahbazi's motivations

8.(S//NF) While little is reported on Shahbazi's motivations, he maintains on his website that he will continue with his crusade

to expose economic corruption. One long-standing contact of IRPO, who claims to be close to power centers in Iran, (Note: real level of access unknown. Endnote) alleged July 9 that several senior clerics want to see Ahmadinejad removed and possibly even jailed prior to the next presidential election. The single-source claimed that clerics are concerned that if Ahmadinejad remains in power until the next election cycle, he will use surplus oil dollars to buy off votes and win a second term. The likes of Palizdar (reftel) and Shahbazi, postulated the businessman, provide Ahmadinejad a little insurance. If the clerics were to have the president removed now, it would only publicly appear to validate corruption charges.

9.(S//NF) Comment: While the possibility of clerics wanting to remove and potentially jail Ahmadinejad can not be substantiated, anecdotal information suggests that Ahmadinejad is becoming a greater liability for the Supreme Leader in his constant attempts to balance the various power centers in Iran. Ahmadinejad, however, is cleverly staying close enough to Palizdar and Shahbazi to burnish his anti-corruption credentials with the populace, but far enough away should they be taken down. It is still too soon to predict the fate of Ahmadinejad in the tumultuous Iranian political landscape.
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